

TESTIMONY OF THE HON. ROSA L. DELAURO
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
PROTECTING OUR KIDS ACT
THURSDAY, JUNE 2, 2022

Thank you, Chairman Nadler, and Vice Chair Dean for your leadership and for holding this emergency markup of the *Protecting Our Kids Act*. This legislation will respond to the devastating school shooting in Uvalde, Texas just over one week ago. Nineteen children and two teachers. There are no words to describe our collective grief over this unnecessary loss of life. Our hearts ache for the students, teachers, school staff, and Uvalde community for their loss. Unfortunately, we in Connecticut know what these families are going through. Nearly a decade after the attack at Sandy Hook Elementary School – where we lost 26 beautiful souls ... 20 of which were babies on that cold December day – these unspeakable and avoidable tragedies, continue happening. Today we take action to address the epidemic of gun violence in this country.

I am pleased that the *Protecting Our Kids Act* includes my legislation, *Ethan's Law*. I introduced this critical legislation in memory of Ethan Song—a Guilford, Connecticut teenager who accidentally shot himself with an unsecured gun in early 2018. The firearm was improperly stored in a Tupperware box with the gun lock keys and ammunition nearby. In my home state of Connecticut, we have passed *Ethan's Law* to protect children on a broad bipartisan basis. The legislation passed the Connecticut General Assembly 127-16, passed the State Senate 34-2 and was signed into law in 2019. Today we are taking a critical step to make *Ethan's Law* the national standard in safe storage.

Ethan's Law is legislation that will finally set federal standards for safe gun storage and will incentivize states to create and implement safe gun storage laws. This legislation is a child safety bill, first and foremost – because losing just one child to accidental gun violence is too many.

What happened to Ethan Song was tragic. No parent should have to lose their child because of an unsecured gun. But the harsh and cruel reality is that having guns in the home increases the risk of unintentional

shootings, suicides, and homicides. They happen to children of all ages. In fact, in homes with guns, the likelihood of accidental death by shooting is four times higher.

Late last year, a school shooting left 4 students dead, and many more wounded in Oxford, Michigan—the perpetrator used an unsecured gun found sitting on his parent’s nightstand. Sadly, the frequency of these awful events is striking and unrelenting. And like many of these shootings, along with Ethan Song’s death, this incident could have been avoided by simply educating gun owners on how to be responsible gun owners – and that begins with the life-saving requirement of safe storage.

Today, an estimated 4.6 million kids live in homes with at least one gun that is loaded and unlocked. That means millions of kids are at risk to endure the same fate as Ethan – and their parents risk the same heartbreak as his parents – the unbearable sadness of having a child taken from us far too early. We cannot continue to let this happen. It is

time for Congress to act - our children's lives depend on it - and that is what we are doing here today.

In the last decade, nearly 2 million firearms have been reported stolen. Between 2010 and 2016, police recovered more than 23,000 stolen firearms that were used to commit kidnapping, armed robberies, sexual assaults, murders, and other violent crimes. Despite the re-occurrences of these horrific and preventable tragedies, current law fails to hold irresponsible gun owners accountable. *Ethan's Law* would change this by addressing this deadly gap in our current laws.

In 2020, there were 368 unintentional shootings by children, resulting in 141 deaths and 242 injuries. And during the pandemic, it has gotten worse – jumping 31 percent. According to Everytown Research and Policy, COVID-19 lockdowns, lack of child care, record gun sales in the U.S. – and a reported surge in first-time gun owners are likely to be the cause. And already in 2022, there have been at least 106 unintentional shootings by children, resulting in 46 deaths and 66 injuries. Our country has seen more than 200 mass shootings since

January 1st. That means there have been more mass shootings than days so far in 2022. We have a shameful, never-ending list of mass and unintentional shootings in our country. Far too many of which are preventable. Enough is enough.

If basic safety measures and consequences had been codified into law, Ethan Song's death could have been prevented. In fact, thousands of these lives could be saved. We have a duty to pass legislation that protects our children from senseless accidental violence.

I have been honored to travel with Ethan's parents, Mike and Kristin Song throughout Connecticut and stand with them at so many events as they shared their heartbreaking story. They have turned their own personal tragedy into a crusade to protect children. Their dedication and strength know no bounds in their fight to make *Ethan's Law* the law of the land. *Ethan's Law* will protect families – both those who own guns and those who do not. Their fierce advocacy and tireless efforts led to *Ethan's Law* passing in the Connecticut Assembly with bipartisan support in 2019. Then they took this fight to Washington D.C.

When Kristin Song found out that *Ethan's Law* was included in the *Protecting Our Kids Act*, she said that the first person she wanted to tell, was Ethan – her beautiful boy that she has fearlessly fought for since the day she was forced to watch him be lowered into the ground. Upon hearing the news, she immediately drove to the cemetery and ran across yelling, and I quote: “Ethan, we did it! Your lifesaving legislation will be heard, it will get a vote.”

So, let us stand with them and pass *Ethan's Law*. As Members of Congress, one of our most sacred duties is to protect the American people – especially our children. On that measure, we have failed – and doing nothing to prevent these tragedies is both cowardly and shameful. Until we take action, innocent children will continue to die.

In the words of Ethan Song's parents, Mike and Kristin, quote: “Not a single person on earth can change the past, but every one of us can change the future.” So, let us change the future while saving countless lives.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for holding this markup. I urge support for the *Protecting Our Kids Act*.